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RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 6695  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 2568  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1440  
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RUEAWJC/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY  
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SUBJECT: HOSTAGE ESCAPE CONTINUES FARC'S WORST YEAR EVER

SUMMARY

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11. Former congressman Oscar Lizcano, held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) for eight years, escaped from a FARC camp along with one of his captors and turned himself into an Army checkpoint in San Jose del Palmar (Choco) on October 26. President Uribe and Defense Minister Santos announced that FARC member Wilson Bueno Largo ("Isaza") would receive a cash reward and asylum in France for helping Lizcano escape. Bueno said he deserted because Colombian military pressure had made living conditions unbearable and called on his former colleagues to follow his example. He condemned the FARC as a group "lacking morals and political orientation." It is unclear if the GOC has the legal authority to allow Lizcano--who faces serious criminal charges--to leave Colombia. End Summary.

EX-CONGRESSMAN LIZCANO ESCAPES WITH FARC CAPTOR

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12. Former Conservative Party congressman Oscar Lizcano and his Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) captor, Wilson Bueno Largo ("Isaza") turned themselves into the Colombian Army on October 26 after escaping from the FARC on October 23. Colombian press reports say this is the first known instance of a FARC member deserting with a hostage. Lizcano, held by the FARC since August 2000, said that he and Bueno escaped at night and wandered through the jungle for 72 hours without sleep until they came across an Army checkpoint near the town of San Jose del Palmar (Choco). Lizcano also said that before his escape, he and fourteen guards from the FARC's Aurelio Rodriguez column--of which Bueno was the commander--had been on a nearly constant march through the jungles of Choco for the last four months due to military pressure.

13. At a press conference on October 27, President Uribe and Defense Minister Santos appeared onstage with Bueno, congratulating him for his "courage" in leaving the rebels and helping Lizcano. Uribe announced that Bueno would receive a cash reward (later announced to be one billion Colombian pesos, or about 419,000 USD) and political asylum in France to protect him from FARC retaliation. Uribe added that he hoped this would encourage other FARC members to leave the group. Santos also said that Colombian forces over the October 26-27 weekend had begun an operation to free Lizcano based on information provided by a previous FARC deserter, but that the two had escaped before the operation was implemented.

EX-CAPTOR CITES HUNGER, FARC ISOLATION

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14. Bueno, who spent twelve years as a FARC combatant, said he decided to desert and help Lizcano because of hunger and isolation prompted by Colombian military pressure that had severely curtailed his column's movements and supplies. He also left to be with his girlfriend, a former FARC member who deserted in July. Bueno publicly called on his former comrades to follow his example, condemning the FARC as a group "lacking morals and political orientation." He predicted the group would soon disappear, because it was severely reduced in numbers and morale. Bueno added that his column had standing orders to kill Lizcano if they encountered the Colombian military, but that he had told the former legislator that he would protect him in such an event.

15. The Lizcano escape represents the latest in a series of public setbacks for the FARC this year. Combined with significant leadership losses, record levels of desertion--approximately 2500 this year according to the Ministry of Defense--and the well-publicized Operation Jaque, several Colombian analysts argued that the FARC's widely dispersed fronts are becoming increasingly isolated from one another as the rebels' command, control, and communications break down. Other commentators suggested that the months-long march by Lizcano and his guards, along with Bueno's decision to flee, indicate the FARC's Secretariat has lost control over the group's remaining 28 "political" hostages.

#### FRENCH ASYLUM REMAINS UNCERTAIN

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16. Local French DMC Alain Fort confirmed that the GOF is willing to receive Bueno if his legal situation in Colombia is resolved. In addition, Ingrid Betancourt personally phoned Bueno and promised she would work to have the French government accept him and his girlfriend, according to leading daily El Tiempo. Still, it is unclear if the GOC has the legal authority to allow Bueno--who faces potential kidnapping and other serious human rights charges--to allow Bueno to depart Colombia. Despite the risks of possible retaliation from the FARC, Bueno said he is not sure whether he would accept an offer of asylum in France.

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